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ABSTRACT

This study examined the relationship between formal program statements and actual practices in one sophomore class in a preservice teacher education program. Specifically, the study evaluated: possible inconsistencies between what is explicitly stated and what is actually done; whether such inconsistencies are intentional or unintentional, desirable or undesirable; and the role of self-reflection in improved practice. The content of the instructor's instruction was audiotaped and analyzed to identify issues and quantify episodes of instruction. A time analysis of topics was compared to formal course goals in the course syllabus and from written assignments. The instructor was also interviewed twice, before and after analysis of the formal documentation and audiotapes. While the results found some inconsistencies between espoused theories and theories-in-use, there was more consistency than inconsistency. Since the subject teacher was also one of the researchers, the study made this teacher more aware of her classroom behaviors. The project supports the idea that teachers need to think systematically about their practice and learn from their experiences. (Contains 14 references.) (JLS)

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An Analysis of Theory To Practice Consistency In Preservice Teacher Education

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An Analysis of Theory To Practice Consistency in Preservice Teacher Education

Teacher educators have long been assailed for their inconsistencies between espoused theories and enacted teaching behaviors. In effect, students receive the message "don't do as I do; do as I say." Teacher educators may be more comfortable espousing effective teaching practices than using them in their own classes. Atkinson and Delamont (1985) have suggested that the mixed messages sent to students result in a diffused program impact. Moreover, these inconsistencies stand as one of several explanations for the apparent low impact of preservice teacher education courses on the socialization of students into teaching. In fact, Zeichner and Gore (1990) suggest that "the whole area regarding the socializing impact of specific academic courses and patterns of academic preparation is in need of further exploration" (p. 336). This project reflects one preliminary step toward examining the impact of a preservice program through first identifying the messages delivered in the program.

The purpose of this project was to examine the relationship between formal program statements and actual practices in one preservice teacher education program. More specifically, are there inconsistencies between what is formally announced and what is actually done in the program? Furthermore, if there are inconsistencies, are the differences intentional or unintentional, desirable or undesirable, from the perspective of a teacher educator in the program? And, relatedly, can this process of self-reflection lead to improved practice?

Theoretical Framework

Argyris and Schon (1974) made a distinction between two aspects of professional practice. They described "espoused theory" (p. 6) as what one communicates to others about the many aspects of how and why to act in particular circumstances. Teacher educators espouse theories about how one should teach. These theories may take the form of verbal statements or formally written proclamations (e.g., course syllabi). For example, such things as how to sequence learning materials, make presentations, ask questions, check for understanding, create and analyze tests, reflect on practices, and so on, would all be typical topics in this category. Espoused theory is distinguished from "theories-in-use" (p. 7) in that the

latter must be constructed from actual behavior. That is, while one might verbalize espoused theories, one actually performs the behaviors identified as theories-in-use. Hence, it is possible to witness a teacher's performance of asking questions and to construct the theory that appears to guide actual practice. It is then possible to compare the consistency between what guides practice (theory-in-use) and how one describes personal beliefs or formally states program goals (espoused theories). It is also possible to facilitate reflection on conflicting theories to arrive at insights into the most desirable practices for future performance.

The key point of these distinctions is that espoused theories and theories-in-use are not always consistent. Inconsistency with regard to espoused theory and theory-in-use has the potential to send confusing messages to recruits. After all, in teacher education programs we model what we are talking about, albeit to a different audience (i.e., we teach adults about teaching rather than teaching children and adolescents about the target topic only--math, science, physical education, etc.). Individuals are not always aware of either the inconsistencies or of the actual theories-in-use. For example, espousing the importance of "wait time" does not necessarily mean that the teacher educator actually waits to allow students to think after posing a question. Another example would be pointedly stating that asking "any questions?" is an inappropriate way to check for understanding and then closing the discussion with "any questions?" In both of these examples, students are faced with conflicting messages from teacher educators who say one thing and do another.

Messages about important topics in a teacher education program are sent in a variety of different ways. One way to categorize various messages is through the use of an adaptation to a model of curricular concerns first presented by Dodds (1983). Dodds separated notions of the **explicit** (written and intentional), **covert** (not written or formal, but, intentional messages sent by the teacher educator), **hidden** (often unnoticed; artifacts of institutional relationships), and **null** (some intentional, and some not; what is omitted or not included in the curriculum). Identifying representations of each of these categories is one way to inform a search for consistency in program messages that might be represented as either espoused theories or theories-in-use.

Methods and Data Sources

One semester-long sophomore class designed to help candidates make the transition from being "students" to becoming "teachers" in a preservice preparation program was selected for scrutiny. This course was selected because it was taught by one of the more experienced teacher educators in the department and for the intended mission of the course. In that course, the content of the instructor's audiotaped instruction was analyzed to identify key themes and to quantify episodes of instruction. Subsequently, a time analysis of topics enacted from the audiotapes was compared to formal course goals identified in the course syllabus, and on written assignments. The consistency of what the instructor emphasized in the course was further contrasted with the formally written expectations of students in the course syllabus and written course materials (e.g., handouts and course notes when available), and written evaluations of two of the students from the course in their subsequent student teaching experience.

Two interviews with the course instructor were also undertaken. The first interview was conducted to explore personally held views (espoused theories) of program goals and course goals. The second interview was conducted following the analysis of formal documentation and the course audiotapes. During the second interview, apparent inconsistencies were discussed and probes were used to explore possible explanations.

Findings

A theoretical framework involving four identifiers of explicit, covert, hidden, and null was presented. These aspects will be used to frame a presentation of the findings.

Explicit

This descriptor refers to written and/or formally identified attributes. Document analysis focused on the course syllabus and written course materials (e.g., handouts and course notes when available), and written evaluations of two of the students from the course in their subsequent student teaching experience.

There are four specific objectives listed in the syllabus. These include that the student will be able

to: (a) Identify and explain the relationship of the physical education program to the total school program; (b) Describe the general nature of the format of physical education lessons at the elementary and secondary levels; (c) Utilize a variety of quantitative and qualitative observation tools to examine teaching in a systematic way; and (d) Identify effective teaching strategies in relation to management, instruction and teacher/student interaction. Subsequently, a calendar of course events describes due dates for course assignments and the timing of discussions surrounding specific observations rather than topics of discussion, per se. Several topics listed in the course objectives were not evident in subsequent course calendar. These topics were, however, a part of the teacher educator's agenda. For example, specific strategies for effective teaching, and links between physical education and other parts of the education process, were not explicitly addressed in the course outline. These were, however, identified as important objectives to be accomplished through the objectives and by way of teacher educator responses to probes during interviews.

The first class session includes largely teacher information-giving regarding course expectations and a contract for grade opportunity. Six observation assignments are described with handouts on the following:

(1) Field notes with the direction to "Describe what happened chronologically. Include descriptions of what the teacher does and what the students do. Describe, in detail, any event, incident, or specific aspect of the lesson you think is important." Students are also directed to identify changes that could improve the lesson and an implementation strategy.

(2) Using a similar descriptive field note strategy, students are directed to specific management episodes (e.g., starting class, getting student attention, grouping students, moving between activities, distributing and collecting equipment, etc.).

(3) A focus on incidents of student inattention and misbehavior and teacher reactions.

(4) A focussed look at space utilization regarding where students are placed and where equipment is placed in the available instructional space.

(5) Using a published systematic observation format, students are directed to code teacher feedback.

(6) Using a time sampling technique, students are directed to observe student time in activity.

Class notes from the second class reflect attention to discussion of requirements surrounding the observation responsibilities and the different approaches to systematic observation.

On student teaching evaluation forms, 15 areas were examined on a five point Likert scale. Paraphrased, these areas included: (1) lesson planning; (2) content selection; (3) accurate subject content; (4) appropriate teacher modeling; (5) variety of activities in the pace of the lesson (6) teacher posed problems requiring student resolution; (7) appropriate climate; (8) high quality and quantity of student involvement and interaction; (9) teacher questions facilitate student thinking rather than memorization; (10) students are encouraged to be aware of their own thinking; (11) materials and media are appropriate to the lesson; (12) assessment (13) awareness of cultural diversity; (14) reflective planning; and (15) positive professional relationship with others.

Covert

This category refers to messages that are not formally written, but, are intentionally sent by the teacher educator. During the second interview, the teacher educator discussed this approach. The teacher educator saw two alternatives to having students understand teaching. One approach involves lecture topics chosen by the instructor and imposed on students on a timetable that fits into the course meetings available. Another approach involves having students identify topics from their own observations such that important topics arise in context and are relevant to the students' experiences. This process was described like this:

> I want them to know that what they observe and what they talk about with each other is very important. I make notes of important points, then summarize important points. That is what we talk about. So they will see their observations as important. So they don't think well, why did I even go out there if <teacher educator's> just going to lecture? All the issues will come up somewhere. I don't feel obliged to have my list of "we must cover these" topics. Because topics come out and I believe students are more likely to remember because they brought it up.

There is a philosophical dilemma here. Some may argue that points that are important should be explicitly written to confirm they receive sufficient attention during the course. Others may suggest that points are only important when relevance to the learner is established. The point of this type of analysis is that such potential inconsistencies can be identified and confirmed as appropriate or remediated to match practice (theory in use) with beliefs (espoused theory).

Other key points on the syllabus and course notes were largely confirmed by the verbal responses of the teacher educator to probes of important goals, with one exception. The teacher educator identified as a key goal the development of "situational decision makers." That is, students who were able to make thoughtful choices from among alternatives when confronted with different students, resources, contexts, and so forth. This goal did not appear explicitly in writing. The covert process for accomplishing this goal was to have students become peer problem solvers working together rather than being totally reliant on the teacher educator for validation and for providing direction.

The notion of developing specific knowledges, skills, attitudes, and values of students in this program elicited some inconsistencies that were not accounted for elsewhere. These are discussed in the "null" section below.

Hidden

Hidden attributes are often unnoticed artifacts of institutional relationships. Mentioned above, one key goal of the teacher educator involved having students develop as situational decision makers and peer problem solvers. There was a clear attempt to "walk the talk" of having students become situational decision makers and to take responsibility for directing discussion during class. Furthermore, students were largely able to work without seeking teacher-educator-created recipes for exactly what to do in certain situations. Instead, the teacher educator would direct students to evaluate the circumstances surrounding decisions made by different teachers in different settings with different resources. Students were then lead through discussion to evaluate the appropriateness of choices and to explore possible alternatives.

The strategy outlined above involves an attempt to vary the typical power hierarchy that exists in

most classes. The traditional power distribution in the class emerged on two instances in the lesson transcripts, where the teacher educator "flexed some muscles" to intimidate and direct the discussion. The teacher educator remembered both instances well and described them as "They [the students in the seminar] pushed a button." One instance involved a discussion of adaptations made for special needs students and the other involved gender equity . The teacher educator described reactions as "I bullied. I cite literature to press my argument.....I do that sometimes even when I don't have a clue; I know they don't have a clue that I don't have a clue."

In the second interview when these points were raised and transcripts from the lessons were reviewed, there was an awareness by the teacher educator of this ability to intimidate. This emergence of power was also linked to a distinct inhibition of the ability of students to return to offering observations and sharing discussion during class. Instead, students seemed less likely to offer opinions or observations freely, and waited silently for someone braver or for the teacher educator to step in and lead the discussion.

A reassessment of the long quote offered up previously also reveals the subtle existence of the power hierarchy. Note that the teacher educator is the one who makes the list of important topics and is the one who directs conversation to these specific events.

Null

The null category describes what is omitted or not included in the curriculum and this is a difficult category to analyze. To some extent, decisions of what to include come down to philosophical decisions regarding what program goals should be met in what courses. For this presentation, only topics that were identified in the explicit category but that were not found elsewhere will be presented. There were three areas of attention that will be briefly presented in this section. First a focus on having teachers be child or student centered was described in the written documentation. In none of the observations or explicit course content is there attention to a focus on student attributes other than one look at the amount of activity time. For example, the quality of student movement, evidence of student learning, or student enjoyment are never explored as part of the course. Secondly, the notion that students need to be aware

of the relationship of the physical education program to the total school program was identified in the course syllabus, but, never addressed in course content. Last, and this may be an extension beyond the purpose of the course, but, there was no visible or explicit attempt to help students with the connection between the systematic observation used in visits to the instructional settings of others, and the application of these same strategies to their own teaching.

Regarding the last point raised, the closest link is described by the teacher educator as to how the different observation strategies may be seen by these students when they student teach. The forms used to report on student performance, however, show no obvious evidence of the need for the collection of systematic data.

Conclusions

There were some inconsistencies between espoused theories and theories-in-use; however, there was, overall, more consistency than inconsistency. The tension that exists between espoused theories and theories-in-use for teacher educators has been demonstrated in this case. The inconsistencies between the two, both intended and unintended, are not surprising. The value of this exploration was best summed up by two particular comments made by the colleague who was the focus of this self-study. One comment was that "This particular project has really opened my eyes to a host of effects that I was unaware of in terms of the effect of my demeanor on the tenor of the class. I didn't see that at all." And, with regard to how things have changed, another response was "I'm trying strategies to move discussion from student to teacher and more student to student...I put problems back to them. I'm enjoying it a lot more."

Significance

This project has been worthwhile. It has reminded each of us of the value in examining what we do. Talking about self-study and doing it are different. We have tried an approach with some collegial assistance and we are encouraged by the results, if a bit intimidated by the time and energy involved.

Still, seeking evidence for consistency between espoused theories and theories-in-use has value with regard to confirming that a program is moving toward sending consistent messages; correcting

inconsistencies when identified; or, identifying inconsistencies that warrant a revisiting of espoused theories such that what the program really does is publicly announced. The National Commission on Teaching and America's Future (1996) noted the need for teachers generally to think systematically about their practice and learn from experience as one of five major propositions (p. 75).

There is a history of documented evidence to support the contention that teachers are unaware of what goes on in their classrooms (Good & Brophy, 1978; Martin & Keller, 1976; Withall, 1972). The generally accepted explanation for this finding is that classrooms are busy places (c.f., Jackson, 1968). Borg, Kelly, Langer, and Gall (1970), however, showed similar results with teachers working with small groups. An alternative (or at least an additional) explanation might be that teachers do not receive adequate instruction in the systematic observation of classroom activities.

Certainly, teachers must attend to something in their instructional settings. In pursuit of teacher definitions of the teaching situation, Placek (1982) cited personal and previous research which suggests that teachers are "more concerned with student behavior than about transmitting a body of knowledge" (p. 49). Placek's conclusion supports the scenario described by Apple (1983) in which pedagogic skills become replaced by techniques for better controlling students (p. 147). An alternative interpretation is presented by Schon (1983). It is possible that the inability to identify what has occurred or is occurring in the classroom might be an artifact of what Schon states as an assumption, that "competent practitioners usually know more than they can say" (p. viii).

The methods modeled in this self-study (one of the authors of this work was the teacher educator studied) reflect an ongoing discussion across institutions to examine and improve our own practice. It is further hoped that our report will stimulate others to reflect on their own performance and search for consistency, or, initiate discussion toward more effective strategies to reach the same ends--competent and effective professional practice. For thoughtful professionals, consistency between beliefs and actual behavior, matters. Ginsburg and Clift (1990) argued that "we must all collaborate in a continuous effort to produce educational institutions that live up to their own stated values or bear the consequences of institutions that might, in effect, be working against the causes of equity, justice, and peace" (p. 460).

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